

VISITOR RECEPTION IN COLLABORATIVE MUSEUM EXHIBITS

by

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VISITOR RECEPTION IN COLLABORATIVE MUSEUM EXHIBITS

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Visitor Reception in Collaborative Museum Exhibits

As museums seek ways to attract wider audiences and increase their relevance to more people, collaboration with community groups has become common practice. Museums are using multiple models for these collaborations, which often include working with people whose perspective has traditionally been left out of the mainstream museum narrative. While many studies on these processes have been conducted, very few focus on visitor reception of information about the process of collaboration that went into the exhibit. Those studies that do exist show that the visiting public is unaware of this work and therefore a key opportunity to engage the public around issues of decolonization, legitimizing worldviews outside of the mainstream narrative, and democratization of museum processes is lost. This project focuses on collaboratively designed exhibits at the Portland Art Museum and is an examination of the processes involved, how the museum is communicating with visitors about their collaborations, and whether those communications are effective.

Keywords: museum visitor outcomes; collaborative exhibits; exhibit evaluation; museum communications; equity and access in museums; new museology

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As museums seek new ways to attract wider audiences and increase their relevance to more people, collaboration with community groups has become common practice for many institutions. Museums are using multiple models for these collaborations, which often include working with community groups whose perspective has traditionally been left out of the mainstream museum narrative. These models vary widely in the amount of control, authority, and power that the museum gives to community groups, and the model used often depends on the purpose of the exhibit, the amount of time available for the project, and the establishment of previous relationships with the community groups in question. The most intensive of collaborations involve a process that allows for both parties to approach the project as equal partners with shared authority, power, and control and results in a transformative process for both the museum and community group, in which both are learning about new approaches to narrative and new worldviews to consider.

It is also important to consider the steps involved in exhibit creation and the multiple ways that information is gathered, selected, and presented. Susan Ashley outlines a circuit of communication that embodies both the process of collaborative exhibit creation and the communication among the exhibit creators, the exhibit itself, and the museum visitor. She describes this as a three-part process involving production (deciding the narrative that will go into the exhibit), text (the design of the exhibit itself), and reception (the reception of the visitor) (Ashley, 2011).

While many studies on processes of collaboration have been conducted, very few focus on visitor reception of information about the process of collaboration that went into the exhibit. Those studies that do exist show that the visiting public is unaware of this work and therefore a

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key opportunity to engage the public around issues of decolonization, legitimizing worldviews outside of the mainstream narrative, and democratization of museum processes is lost (Schultz, 2011, Krmpotich & Anderson, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

This study works to examine the role of visitor reception in museum collaborations. It specifically sets out to analyze the third part of the production-text-reception model of collaborative exhibit creation as described by Ashely (2011). This model encapsulates the entirety of the museum exhibit process from conception to reception: the production of exhibit content, the textual representation of that context as embodied in the physical exhibit, and the reception of the information and forms of communication by an audience of museum visitors. This model indicates that each component is integral to the overall success of the exhibit. Much museum work around community collaborations focuses on the production and text processes. In the same vein, museums also focus on visitor outcomes in terms of experience and reception of exhibits' key messages. This study posits that, in practice, these three components rarely converge, and museums are missing key opportunities to teach their visitors about the role of museums in their communities, as well as the nature of collaborative knowledge sharing and divergent worldviews.

Research Methodology

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine how museums are communicating with their visitors about their collaborative exhibit work, and whether visitors are receptive to these communications.

Methodological Paradigm

The methods of research used here generally fall into the interpretivist paradigm, as I was reliant on visitors and museum professionals to describe their experiences, thoughts, and recollections in their own words. There is also some specific fact-base information that is used in this study, such as the methods used by museums for communications, and which of those methods were used by visitors. However, the main purpose – to determine whether museums are effectively engaging visitors around their community collaborations – is contingent on visitor's reactions to and interpretation of the information presented to them. Even my own interpretation and analysis of documents of the museum's communications regarding their collaborations may be subjective, in that some messaging may be implicit rather than explicit and will require a degree of interpretation.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher who is interested in increased access to cultural institutions and in being critical of hegemonic Western narrative norms, I have a bias in favor of changing traditions in the field of museum work. Although this serves me well in strengthening my critical lens towards museum practice, it was important to check this bias by including review of literature that shows collaborative museology work is not always as effective as one may like. For example, Weil (1999), Lonetree (2006), and Phillips (2003) all question the effectiveness of at least some aspects of collaborative exhibit making. As a white, middle-class person from the United States, it is also important to check my own privilege and to work to see how my own worldview may render some aspects of the relational dynamics between the museum and some communities invisible to me.

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Research Questions

The main question guiding my research is, how are arts and culture museums communicating to their visitors about the collaborative work they are doing with community groups to build exhibits? My sub-questions include the following: If collaborations are a way for museums to change their standard methods of operation and change their relationships to and relevance for the public, what effect does this have on the exhibit visitor? How are museums communicating about their collaborations with their visitors within exhibits? How are museums communicating about their collaborations with their visitors outside of the exhibit? What other methods are museums of communication or engagement to communicate to visitors about their collaborations? How are visitors responding to the museum's communications about their collaborations? How do museums evaluate for visitor reception of information about their collaborations?

Definitions

Mainstream Museums: These are cultural institutions with a broad range of constituents and a broad mission. They are differentiated from community museums, which are controlled by the communities they represent.

Community: Definitions of community, in terms of museum work, evolves over time but generally refers to groups of people outside of the institutional structure that are impacted by or within the influence of the museum. They may or may not participate in the museum in any way, but are part of the general cultural landscape that the museum is situated in. The term sometimes refers specifically to marginalized people whose voices have previously been left out of the mainstream museum narrative. Caution should be taken when using this term to avoid

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misrepresentation or creating the illusion that populations with similar characteristics or within a particular geographic region all share the same experiences, wants, or needs.

Collaboration: There are many models of collaboration used by museums when they work with community groups on exhibits and programming. It has widely been acknowledged that the most successful types of museum collaboration involve two-way knowledge sharing that results in new skills, understanding of other worldviews, and/or confidence in abilities. This type of intensive collaboration also involves some amount of shared authority, power, and control.

Delimitations

This study uses the Portland Art Museum (PAM) as a case study for examining how museums communicate to visitors about their collaborations. During my study there were three exhibits at the museum that were co-created with outside community groups or individuals:

Interwoven Radiance in the museum's Center for Contemporary Native Art (CCNA), *Invisible Me* in the museum's Object Stories gallery, and *Portland Meet Portland*, the interpretive gallery within an exhibit called *Common Ground*. Both the CCNA and Object Stories galleries are unique spaces in that they host ongoing, rotating exhibits that are collaborations between the museum and featured artists, groups, or individuals; certain parameters on projects in these spaces have been set up by the museum based on several factors; the museum has a chance to learn from each successive project.

The CCNA is a gallery within the Portland Art Museum that was created to host contemporary Native artists and give featured artists control over how their work is presented – they work with museum staff to design the exhibit and programming. The artist participants in the CCNA are Native American but not necessarily acting as representatives of their entire communities - the exhibit typically focuses on individual artists or a small group of artists and is

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not a didactic display meant to explain the experience or culture of entire tribes, bands, or communities, although that may play a part in some exhibits. This gallery opened in 2015 and hosts two exhibits per year, so there is a sizable body of documentation and history for analysis. The general parameters of co-creation have been established over time as the museum and its staff have worked on each exhibit.

This study also examined two other collaborative exhibits at the Portland Art Museum (PAM) to create more comparative data. The exhibit *Invisible Me*, which is part of the museum's Object Stories project, focuses on the experiences of people living with invisible disabilities. Similar to the Center for Contemporary Native Art, Object Stories also functions as a rotating gallery with exhibits that are created collaboratively with participants in a consistent but flexible process. Participant collaborators work with the museum to craft messaging, make audio recordings of their stories, choose objects of personal significance to them, write labels, write other exhibit text, design programming, and craft visitor engagement components. The third exhibit, *Portland Meet Portland*, is the education and interpretive gallery within a larger exhibit called *Common Ground*. This larger exhibit features 25 years of work by photographer Fazal Sheikh, who focuses on the experiences of refugees, immigrants, and displaced people. The *Portland Meet Portland* gallery is at the end of the exhibit and was created in collaboration with several organizations that work with refugees locally in Portland, as well as individuals from that community.

I am focusing this study on a mainstream museum and their work with communities or persons whose voices or input has generally been left out of the mainstream museum narrative. I specifically wanted to study a mainstream museum because the collaborative relationships and power dynamics between the museum and the collaborators is necessarily different than it would

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be at a community museum that is under the control of the group of people it serves to represent. In the mainstream museum, community collaborations are used to change or disrupt standard practices, and as such call in to question larger issues of national and regional identity, worldview, and narrative discourse. It would perhaps be ideal to focus on a fully-collaborative, multi-year project, this type of exhibit is likely more of a realistic model in that the resources and time required are more doable for most museums.

Limitations

This is a case study of one museum, and is necessarily limited by the singular focus. In addition, the exhibits examined were relatively small within the museum and not easily accessible from the museum entrance nor the showcase exhibit that one encounters upon entry to the museum. This may have limited or biased visitor intercept surveys participants in that they may not have specifically sought out this exhibit, be aware that it was created collaboratively, or have additional outside information. It was at times difficult to intercept enough visitors to make a sound analysis of visitor survey answers, particularly in *Interwoven Radiance*, which was the most isolated of the exhibits within the museum.

As this study includes qualitative inquiry, findings can be interpretive differently depending on the researcher and necessitated validation techniques that will be outlined later in this proposal. As the researcher, I personally conducted interviews with museum staff and visitors, and remained aware of any potential influence I may have had on interview or survey subjects. As the researcher, I also have inherent biases that were examined self-reflexively, and that I have already outlined.

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Benefits of the Study

This study benefits museum practitioners who are interested in raising awareness of their collaborative work and the collaborative work of museums in general. It adds to the scant known literature that specifically examines visitor reception of messaging about collaboratively created museum exhibits.

Research Design

Approach

The purpose of this research is to determine how museums are communicating with visitors about their collaboratively designed exhibits. As such, it is an examination of practice and the theories that inform that practice. As a narrowly focused case study, the purpose is not only to learn what museums are doing in general around this issue, but to map out and understand the interrelated ways that museums may be communicating information about their collaborations to their visitors, and the effectiveness of these communications. These two components – the existing communications and the reception of the communications – are central to exhibit design and messaging. However, the additional concept of collaboration complicates the matter, as museum visitors may not understand the nature of museum collaborations. They may not even understand what the word collaboration means (Krmpotich and Anderson, 2005). Very few known studies exist that specifically focus on collaborative exhibits and visitor outcomes.

Strategy of Inquiry

The strategy of inquiry, then, is to examine what is going on in one museum and three exhibits within that museum to attempt to get a picture of how the Portland Art Museum is communicating to its visitors about collaborations. Although limited in scope, the labor-intensive

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work of gathering data on all aspects of communication around the exhibits as well as visitor-intercept surveys will add to the limited known literature on this topic. A third important aspect will be the staff perspective on this topic, which may give additional insight into the ways that museums can engage their visitors around the collaborative work that they do.

I am using other studies on visitor outcomes, museum communications, and museum exhibit analysis for the basis of my research design. Doering et al. (1997) used surveys to determine whether previous experience had any bearing on what visitors saw as the intent of the exhibit its relation to them. Susan Ashley (2011) analyzed the content and presentation of the *Next Stop Freedom* exhibit, in terms of its effectiveness in conveying the intents of its creators and used visitor interviews and questionnaires to gauge visitor perception to underlying messages, new ideas, likes, dislikes, reaction to a multimedia technique, and personal relation to the exhibit. Simon (2011) used visitor books to analyze reactions for problematic responses. Similarly, Hughes (2003) looked at curator's statements, wall texts, visitor comments, and critical reviews to determine ethical issues with the exhibit examined. In their study of *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* exhibit at the Glenbow Museum, Krmpotich, & Anderson looked at the multiple ways the museum attempted to communicate about the exhibit collaboration, as well as conducted semi-structured interviews with visitors (2005). Schultz also conducted surveys and interviews with visitors to find out, among other things, what messaging visitors were retaining regarding a collaborative exhibit at the Museum of Anthropology in British Columbia (2011). These previous studies set a standard of methodology for examining visitor outcomes in general, and regarding exhibit messaging specifically: textual and environmental analysis followed by visitor intercept surveys or interviews.

Overview of Design: Site Selection for Case Study

This study asks, how are museums in general, and the Portland Art Museum in particular, engaging their visitors around information about their collaborative exhibits. Are visitors to the three exhibits at the Portland Art Museum leaving with an understanding of the collaborative work that went into the gallery? The Portland Art Museum was chosen as the site for this research because it is a mainstream art museum that engages in several methods for creating exhibits and has come up with some creative approaches to community collaborations that are unique in the field. Within this art museum, visitors will encounter exhibits that are created in what may be thought of as the standard way – with museum staff and perhaps outside experts as consultants, exhibit text written from an anonymous curator’s point of view, and without any additional engagement techniques within the exhibit other than what one might expect to see in any art museum in the United States. They also have two permanent rotating exhibits that are created in collaboration with various community groups, at least one permanent exhibit that includes multiple and innovative methods of visitor engagement (as already described), as well as temporary exhibits and events that fall outside of what would be considered traditional art museum activity.

As the Portland Art Museum is providing this mix of exhibit, engagement, and collaborative activities, it is an interesting site of study. Some visitors may be aware of this range of activity and more receptive to information about exhibit collaborations. Others may know nothing about the innovative work that the museum has been engaging in. The museum may or may not be effectively communicating their approach and activities to the public and their visitors.

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Overview of Design: Document and Exhibit Analysis

Several types of documents were analyzed for this study. The purpose of the document analysis was to find out where, how, and to what audiences the Portland Art Museum is communicating about their collaborative work that produced the exhibits in this study. The scope of the document analysis depended on available materials, but included promotional materials produced by the museum, media articles and news reports, press kits, social media, the museum's website, and the text within the exhibit itself. I also conducted an environmental scan of each exhibit, to determine what methods were employed to communicate with visitors, and which methods conveyed information about collaboration. This portion of my data collection occurred both before and after staff interviews. Staff provided me with additional resources for further document analysis.

Overview of Design: Interviews with Key Staff at Portland Art Museum

I conducted interviews with key staff at the Portland Art Museum. I specifically chose staff who either work directly on the exhibits in the study or who play a role in museum communications. These included Mike Murawski, director of education and public programs; Kristin Bayans, manager of interpretive media; and Laura Bartroff, director of communications. Murawski manages the CCNA, Bayans manages the Object Stories galleries, and both worked on the *Portland Meet Portland* interpretive gallery. Participants were recruited via email. Each interview was an hour long.

The purpose of the interviews was to learn about the nature of the collaborations, staff perspective on how the museum is attempting to communicate with visitors about collaboration, intended outcomes for the exhibit, if the museum had done visitor outcome evaluations on the exhibit, and whether there were additional resources I should examine.

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Overview of Design: Visitor Intercept Surveys

The final stage of my data collection process was visitor outcome surveys at each of the three exhibits at the Portland Art Museum. The main purpose was to evaluate whether visitors to the exhibits knew that they were created collaboratively, and how they received that information. I also asked questions about the purpose of their visit, to situate their experience in the larger picture of their own intentions for visiting the exhibit. I was able to talk with 55 visitors: 16 in *Interwoven Radiance*, 20 in *Invisible Me*, and 19 in *Portland Meet Portland*.

Visitors were recruited through verbal interaction with the researcher. All participants were adults. Surveys were conducted over several weekends and were targeted at only one individual within groups of visitors that came into the exhibit together. If others within each group asked to participate, they were allowed to do so (meaning they were allowed to discuss the survey as a group as questions were being answered, if they wanted). The surveys were anonymous, and no personal identifying information was collected. The surveys were conducted either at the exit of the exhibits or within the exhibits by the principal investigator only. Survey answers were written down by the principal investigator. Separate printed versions of the survey were available upon request. An additional sheet of description about the study with the principal investigator's contact information was also made available after each survey was completed. Each survey generally took between five and seven minutes to complete.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

Participation in this research project posed little to no risks for participants. There is a risk of loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality, and the steps taken to mitigate those risks will be outlined later in this proposal.

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Expected Findings

Based on the known literature, I expected to find that the Portland Art Museum was making some attempt to communicate information about their collaborations with visitors, but that it is not a priority outcome for the museum. I also expected to find that most visitors do not notice or retain information about the collaborations. Some themes I expected to encounter were implicit versus explicit exhibit messaging, the varying effectiveness of different modes of communication within museum exhibits, and museum visitor learning.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Overview

Several types of data were collected over the course of this research study. The first stage of data collection involved document analysis and environmental scan of the three exhibits within the case study museum. Next, I interviewed staff at the Portland Art Museum that were involved with the three exhibits or communication at the museum. These semi-structured interviews took place in person with follow up over email and were documented via note-taking and audio recording (as consented by participants). Interviews lasted approximately one hour. The last stage of data collection was visitor intercept surveys at the site of the case study museum. These surveys were conducted either near the exit of or within the three collaborative exhibits that were part of this study. Information was collected via hand-written notes. These surveys were administered over several weekends in order to secure a large enough data set for analysis. Each survey took approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Data collection instruments can be found in the Appendix.

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Research Population and Recruitment Methods

Portland Art Museum staff interviewees were chosen based on their involvement with the three exhibits in this study and/or their role in creating marketing or other communications for the museum. These participants were recruited via email.

Visitor intercept survey participants were approached within or near the exit of the Center for Contemporary Native Art, *Object Stories: Invisible Me*, or the *Portland Meet Portland* section of *Common Ground*. I approached people based on whether they were looking at the exhibit elements for more than one minute and took brief, approximately five-minute breaks in between surveys during which time I was not recruiting participants. I verbally recruited these participants. My original intent was to interview every third person who entered the galleries, but this became untenable because some spaces had multiple entrances, some visitors only walked through or spent less than one minute looking at the contents of the galleries, or the infrequency of visitors in a particular gallery at a particular time.

Informed Consent Procedures

Consent to participate was obtained from research participants in a couple of different ways. Interview subjects reviewed the consent form with the researcher in-person and were asked to sign the form to affirm agreement to participate. They were also given a copy of the form for their own records. Interview subjects received recruitment emails before participating and had multiple points at which they were able to ask questions about the study and the nature of their requested participation. Visitor intercept survey participants were given information about the nature of the study before beginning the survey and were asked to verbally give assent to participate. A copy of this information was made available to them if they wanted it. All subjects were given the opportunity to take the contact information of the main

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investigator and the research advisor, and were encouraged to contact them if any questions or concerns arise. They were all be given the opportunity to ask any questions before participating.

There were no minors involved in this study. This study did not involve non-English speakers.

Provisions for Participant and Data Confidentiality

Portland Art Museum staff that were interviewed were not kept anonymous; there was no way to properly anonymize their input in a way that the average reader would not be able to guess their identity. Visitor intercept survey participants were not asked any personally identifying information.

Potential Research Risks or Discomfort to Participants

This research project poses low to no risks for participants. There are minimal risks (loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality) associated with participating in this study, and steps have been taken to mitigate those risks, such as anonymizing survey information at the point of coding and analysis. No personally identifying information was collected from visitor intercept surveys. The greatest risk and discomfort may be for staff interview participants if they felt that the information they gave was not in alignment with the official position of the museum or possibly their managers. In order to mitigate that risk, staff interview participants were made fully aware that the information they gave would not necessarily be confidential. It would be impossible for their identities to remain confidential in any discussion of their interviews in the final research paper, as they will necessarily be identified with their institution and even minimal information would allow a reader to guess their identity. They had the option to decline participation if they deem these risks too great.

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Potential Benefits to Participants

This study benefits museum visitors in general because it may clarify whether museum communication efforts are successful and offer recommendations to improve visitor experience in regards to transparency and information offered about museums' collaborative processes. I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the museum field as a whole, and specifically to help practitioners think about engaging visitors with their collaborative exhibit processes. Museum visitor participants could potentially benefit in the future if this research were used to improve museum communication and messaging to visitors around collaborative exhibit processes.

Data Collection and Disposition Procedures

Any information that was obtained in connection with this study has been and continues to be carefully and securely maintained. All research records are stored on a password-protected computer, and hard copies of documents are stored in a locked file cabinet. Research records will be retained through completion of this research project for validation purposes and shortly past publication of the master's research project; research records will be destroyed one year after completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and the faculty research adviser will have access to these records.

Preliminary Coding and Analysis Procedures

In my initial coding scheme for data collected from the Portland Art Museum, I looked for types of communications that museum engage in, both in and outside of an exhibit. For the visitor intercept surveys, I coded the answers to questions about who designed the exhibits and wrote the text, as well as the reasons given for these answers.

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Categories for in-exhibit observations and document analysis covers the many ways that messages may be shared and received in museum exhibits: text, objects, exhibit audio, exhibit video, programming or docent talks, exhibit interactives, and other display/environmental aspects. These were then compared against the data collected in visitor surveys and staff interviews. I continued to compare categories and clusters anticipated by the literature with the actual data collected and adjust coding throughout the process.

Categories for coding exhibit collaborations align with the authority and control spectrum that can be found in Appendix B and was developed from Lynch (2013), Phillips (2003), and Simon (2010) and includes hosted exhibits, fully collaborative co-created exhibits, and exhibits that utilized consultancy. These categories are strongly suggested by the literature and were continuously be compared against data collection to allow for adjustment as necessary.

Strategies for Validating Findings

To validate findings throughout the research project, I used the techniques established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Peer-debriefing consisted of face-to-face meetings with my research and content advisors at the University of Oregon took place several times per quarter, as well as the group of other students in my cohort that are also conducting research at museums. I included negative case analysis by attempting to find case studies that may disconfirm my findings. Staff interviewed at the Portland Art Museum were able to review quotes that will be attributed to them for accuracy. This project offers ample opportunity for thick description, as the physical space and elements of the exhibit are described and analyzed in detail. In addition, there is a wealth of contextual data used to describe this particular site for case study and the elements that make it unique as well as typical in the field.

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Before beginning this research project, I had spent a considerable amount of time at the case study site (the Portland Art Museum, the Center for Contemporary Native Art, and the Object Stories gallery), so I came to the study with some preexisting understanding of the environment and activities that occur within this environment. I also employed prolonged engagement techniques and spent considerable additional time during the study at the site, as the research required multiple visits for document analysis, staff interviews, and visitor intercept surveys. Persistent observation occurred over multiple site visits and multiple days of conducting visitor intercept surveys. Data has been triangulated through the three main exhibits and multiple research methods – text analysis, staff interviews, and visitor intercept surveys.

Throughout the research process, I kept a detailed research audit trail via electronic journal and hard copy that includes field notes, research instrument documentation, raw data, process notes and detailed steps in the research process, all notes on coding and analysis procedures and findings, as well as reflexive journal notes (including any materials relating to intentions and dispositions). Referential adequacy was established through detailed records on all textual analysis documents used (by type and type of information), as well as spreadsheets of survey responses.

CHAPTER II: ISSUES RELATED TO COLLABORATION AND THE MUSEUM

The museum, as an institution and profession, has been in the process of change for last several decades. Introduction of many critical lenses, but specifically postcolonialism and indigenous activism, has led to new ways of thinking of museum discourse and informed the new museology theory and practice. A general trend toward inclusion, diversity initiatives, education programs, and even social activism has occurred in an attempt to reorient the museum's place in society away from the embodiment of the traditional hegemonic nationalist agenda toward a site of critical discourse, community collaboration and service, and heightened relevance to a larger sector of the population than was previously engaged.

Embedded in these efforts is a concern over the best ways to not only attract a greater number of people, but also to be able to successfully convey new information. This includes understanding of other cultures' worldviews, as well as being able to engage with difficult or challenging histories. When discussing "other" worldviews, this includes marginalized cultures and communities, and specifically those that have been impacted by the museum as a site of reinforced colonialism. Parallel efforts of including more voices in museums products and working to diversify visitor demographics go hand-in-hand, the idea being that making the content and the way that content is presented more relevant to more people will help solve audience diversity problems, among other issues.

Surface-level changes and isolated offerings, for example free admissions days or education programs (Rushton, 2017; Jancovich, 2017), are not enough on their own to attract a more diverse museum audience and additionally do not address issues of self-representation. Negative perception and mistrust run deep and can only be addressed by solutions of substantive change. Community collaborations in museums are an opportunity for transformative change for

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both institutions and community groups. As cultural institutions work to become more relevant and inclusive, it has become clear that superficial efforts are not enough, and structural disruption may be key to effect real change.

Heritage and identity

Museums are the keepers and creators of our heritage and identity, but what do we mean by “our” and what do we mean by “identity”? Jo Littler (2008), writing about race, describes heritage as a term that has been used throughout history as a vehicle for power. She writes how heritage came to be the provenance of certain groups, at the expense of others, to signify lineage and racial superiority, as “one of a range of cultural sites and narratives through which such discourses of superiority and power could be naturalized and sustained” (p. 91).

Structures of colonial dominance are reinforced through many means, including culture. As museums are the speakers of cultural heritage, they too have been used to reinforce this dominance. When we consider museums in this way, as one of the hallmarks of white colonialist culture, it becomes a little easier to understand why some people do not feel that museums are very good places to go to have positive cultural experiences, where they learn something about themselves or are empowered by a deeper sense of identity and connection to their (or our) heritage. This is a lot of baggage for museums to overcome. Additionally, as heritage discourse operates on a feedback loop through its instruments of engagement, museums deal in the discourse of heritage. Decisions regarding collections management, object display and exhibition design, repatriation policies, and collaborations and partnerships work together to make up the voice of the museum and its position in the discourse on culture and heritage. The critique of heritage is linked with post-colonial critiques of museums and anthropology.

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This is not to say the use of heritage as a device for meaning-making is all negative. Laurajane Smith (2006) writes that “heritage is a symbolic representation of identity” (p. 52). In other words, representation is identity: “The use of the past to construct ideas of individual and group identities is part of the human condition” (p. 33). James Clifford (2004) acknowledges that the use of heritage can function as a band-aid rather than a systemic fix, but also contends this perspective neglects “a great deal of the local, national, and international meaning activated by heritage work” (p. 9). Christina Kreps (2011) writes about the role of indigenous peoples claiming control over how their heritage is treated by museums as an important part of decolonizing museums and creating a more ethical relationship with source communities.

Relevance, diversity, and ethics

Museums, particularly arts museums, have a demographics problem. People have many leisure time options and formats for consuming culture, whether through informal or formal activities, institutions, highly localized events, or Internet streaming. There are also more museums than ever before, creating a highly competitive environment for museums as leisure time activities. Although 70% of the U.S. adult population visit museums every year and they are generally seen as highly-trusted sources of information, that doesn’t paint the whole picture (Griffiths & King, 2008). Studies show that visitor demographics do not reflect U.S. ethnic and racial diversity, and in art museums specifically the issue seems to be getting worse, despite efforts to address the problem (Farrell & Medvedeva, 2010). As the country gets more racially and ethnically diverse over the next 25 years, the problem will only be compounded unless current trends are reversed. So, this is one motivator for museums to work on increasing their relevance to more people.

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Another is a question of ethics and public service. As non-profit museums have a duty to serve the public, the AAM's Code of Ethics (2000) proscribes that, "programs are accessible and encourage participation of the widest possible audience consistent with its mission and resources," and, "programs respect pluralistic values, traditions, and concerns." These generalized statements promote the idea that the core function of the museum is to serve society and provide educational resources. Working to get more diverse populations involved in museums is not only the right thing to do for the museum and the wider community, it is also the ethical thing to do.

Collaboration as an approach

Community collaborations can give museums the opportunity to bring new populations in their doors and allow community perspectives into the museum to be presented to a wider audience. Embedded in the effort to address the imbalance and share authority and control are a number of benefits to both museums and community groups, as reviewed by Weil (1999), Schultz (2011), Phillips (2003), and Lynch (2013). Collaborations can increase research capacity for museums and help present corrected misrepresentations and misinformation. They break down the divide between museums and communities, literally changing the voices present and the stories being told. They can increase the reach of community partners or grant access to the objects of source communities. Collaborations can be capacity-building opportunities for community partners, as well as meeting their particular need independent of the museum.

Despite the many benefits to these types of working relationships, however, there are also risks; the collaborative model is not always viable or the most effective way of working. Lonetree (2006) criticizes the community approach as possibly not being able to tell the "hard truths" because of cultural sensitivities. The amount of time, effort, and commitment required to

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create a power-sharing collaborative dynamic is likely not realistic for every museum project.

Phillips questions whether collaborations are effective as change-agents at all, or merely serve as a symbol of restitution (2003).

As imperfect as the project of collaboration may be, it is still an important tool of engagement, equity, and cultural justice. As much as the literature critiques collaboration it also offers ideas to make it better. Is there a distinguishable difference between critiques of the fundamental nature of collaboration in museums, and simply the pitfalls that can occur when the process does not go as planned or is not properly thought out? There may not be a viable alternative approach for museums that are interested in sharing control of their resources or fully committing to equity. As Weil (1999) writes, as long as the expectations are within the parameters of the roles of museums, collaboration is a good approach for institutions that have the time, inclination, and appropriate community partners available.

Phillips (2003) raises an important point, though, that is relevant - whether collaborations can effect permanent long-term structural power dynamics for all aspects of the institution. She emphasizes that “a key ethical principle of collaborative exhibition projects is...that *both* sides should be able to define and gain the benefits they deem appropriate” (p. 159). Thus, power dynamics must be taken into account for two-way collaborative efforts at museum to be successful. These dynamics and the efforts to address them through process can be seen in Lynch (2011 & 2013) and Chavez Lamar (2008). As Jancovich (2015) points out, without a change in decision-making power at the top tier of these institutions and their funders, not much will change in terms of public engagement and participation - museums will continue to attract mostly the same audience that they always have.

Typologies of Museum Collaborations

Examining collaborations as a model for structural change in museums helps create a lens for understanding and studying them. Phillips (2003) writes about a typology based on a combination of decision-making processes and presentation of perspective. She categorizes exhibit collaborations as adhering to either a community-based model or multi-vocal mode. In the first, decision-making power mainly rests in the hands of the community partners; in the second, the traditional perspective of the museum is placed alongside the perspective of the community partners. Simon also creates a typology of museum collaborations in her book, *The Participatory Museum* (2010). She outlines four models for working with communities based on various factors, including who has control over the project, the decision-making process, and the institution's history of working with communities, among others. These models range from community partners as "contributory" participants to creators of exhibits that are hosted by the museum (p. 190).

These are only a few examples where power dynamics, power sharing, and control have come up as defining features of museum collaborations with non-institutional partners; others can be found in Lynch, 2011; Chavez Lamar 2008; and Sheppard, 2008. The spectrum of authority and control, found in Appendix B, is informed by these sources. This visual representation of the range of collaborative types illustrates decision-making power as a central component of these projects, with full control in the hands of the community partners on one end of the spectrum and in the hands of the museum on the other end of the spectrum. In the middle is what would be considered a full collaboration in which, as Phillips (2003) describes, both sides share decision-making and each define goals for the project.

Visitor engagement with museum collaborations

This study works to include visitor reception as an essential component of the general collaborative museum exhibit model. It specifically sets out to analyze the third part of the production-text-reception model of collaborative exhibit creation as described by Ashley (2011). This model, illustrated in Appendix A, encapsulates the entirety of the museum exhibit process from conception to reception: the production of exhibit content, the textual representation of that context as embodied in the physical exhibit, and the reception of the information and forms of communication by an audience of museum visitors. This model indicates that each component is integral to the overall success of the exhibit. Much museum work around community collaborations focuses on the production and text processes. In the same vein, museums also focus on visitor outcomes in terms of experience and reception of exhibits' key messages. This study posits that, in practice, these three components rarely converge, and museums are missing key opportunities to teach their visitors about the role of museums in their communities, as well as the nature of collaborative knowledge sharing and divergent worldviews.

Margaret Lindauer (2007) gives ideas for applying critical pedagogy to exhibit design, specifically the written text in the physical exhibition space. She emphasizes questions that get visitors talking about their own thoughts, feelings, and opinions and also shed light on the power structures inherent in the sharing, creation, and acquiring of knowledge. If the primary principles of critical pedagogy are exposing power structures and to inspire resistance, then bringing collaborators into the museum, giving up control to community groups, and making that process evident to visitors is an interesting way to address that.

The previous knowledge of visitors has long been studied as a general component to museum experience and also as a barrier to reaching visitors with new information (Schultz,

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2011; Doering, Pekarik, & Kindlon, 1997). Schultz (2011) posits that “only when there is public recognition of community involvement at the museum can the full benefits of collaboration be realized” (p. 2). Many people do not understand the nature of museum work, as it has been intentionally obscured in order to provide an apparently seamlessly authoritative point of view, and transparency regarding production processes, particularly for collaboratively designed exhibits, could be eye-opening for the public. It could possibly change the way they conceive of knowledge being made, and the types of knowledge that are legitimized by the museum space. Understanding how museums are already communicating this information, reasons why they may choose not to do so, and what factors would be involved in audience reception of this information requires understanding of the ways visitors experience museums.

CHAPTER III: MUSEUM LEARNING, COMMUNICATIONS, AND COLLABORATION

Learning in museums

In order to analyze how visitors may interact with collaborative exhibits and what they get out of them, it is important to understand the museum experience and how learning in this environment occurs. There is recognition in the field that learning in museums is a complex phenomenon that is affected by many variables having to do with the offerings at the museum and the visitors themselves. Falk and Dierking (2013) outline the interplay of contexts that are essential to understanding the experience of visitors to a museum, including the personal reasons for visiting, the sociocultural context of the museum, the physical environment of the museum, and the way museums and learning can change over time. All of these factors play a part in understanding how museum learning occurs.

Taking these contexts into account, many studies of visitor reactions to museum visits include collection of demographic data, previous experiences and knowledge, and motivations for visiting. For example: the visitor's frequency of visits to the museum, the reason they visited, gender, ethnicity, age, education level, occupation (Doering et al., 1999), where they were from, familiarity with specific exhibit topic (Doering, Pekarik, & Kindlon, 1997), and interest in the topic (Falk, 2004). They may also want to know the visitor's source of information about the exhibit prior to visiting (Doering et al., 1999). Some studies chose sociological theories on decision making to inform how they approached understanding what motivates visitors to attend museums and specific exhibits (Doering, Bickford, Karns, & Kindlon, 1999). These authors cite David Prince's theory that decisions are based on the information available on the choice to be made and the person's feelings about the place. Basically, what do they know about it and what value do they assign it?

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Linking past experiences to visitor learning in museums builds upon constructivist theories of education and the Contextual Model of learning. This holistic view asserts that it is not possible to understand learning in museums without looking at the whole picture, which includes the visitor's pre-visit makeup of interests, knowledge, demographics, experience, and motivations plus their experiences while in the museum - things like social interaction, ease of navigation, and their perceptions of the exhibit (Falk, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 2013). Social interactions have been shown to be crucial (Schultz, 2011), which may be linked to how learning works in general or the specific open-choice environment of the museum. Falk (2004) writes, "Learners in free-choice learning situations, as exemplified by casual visitors to a museum, self-select what to learn about based upon their interests and prior experiences, why to learn based upon their motivations and expectations, and how to learn based upon their learning styles, development, and social/cultural preferences" (p. S88). Therefore, understanding the sum total of museum learning requires understanding the larger context of an individual's identity and experience: reception and retention of information, not to mention decision to visit in the first place, is contingent on what the visitor responds to, based on who they are. Additionally, Falk (2004) posits that time is also part of the equation – as learning is an active, on-going process.

In short, learning in museums is a complicated business and a deep engagement with visitors is the only way to get a true understanding of outcomes and their causal relationships. However, while museums need to take into account the variables that make up the visiting public, and what that public is looking for as far as a museum experience, these factors are largely outside of the museum's control. They can act on the understanding that they need to appeal to a wide variety of motivations and learning styles and accommodate those variables through their design of the museum and in their communications to the public. They can attempt

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to create a better understanding of the types of values they embody, and the types of experiences that can be had at the museum. In trying to understand this process of communication and environmental engagement, what are instruments of communication and engagement employed by museums? And, considering the web of variables that shape visitor experience, are there key components that museums can focus on, particularly in the context of this study, to get visitors to understand the work of the museum in a new way?

Museum communication

In *The Museum Experience Revisited*, Falk and Dierking (2013) map out all the factors affecting visitor experience. Pre-visit knowledge is key, which is one area that the museum may be able to influence. Available information combines with what the potential visitor responds to and what they value to make up the pre-visit expectations. But, again, there is only so much the museum can do. Falk and Dierking write, “a major, if not the *primary* vehicle for shaping people’s expectations for a visit, is word-of mouth, particularly from trusted friends or relatives” (p. 86). They also write that communications such as hand-outs, mailings, posters, and press releases do not have much impact on public expectations. Lin (2011) partially agrees with this assessment, writing that word of mouth is the most effective promotions tool, and should be utilized “by reaching opinion leaders or by encouraging testimonials from satisfied visitors” (p. 212). However, he suggests that media and public relations are effective means of reaching the public and that it was the combination of changes in exhibit programming and “widespread news coverage” (p. 205) that led to a 30% increase in visitors from disadvantaged economic classes at the Tyne and Wear Museums. O’Donoghue (2010) agrees that media coverage and word of mouth are the most effective tools the museum has in communicating to the wider public.

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Examining communication strategies of museums, including web, marketing, and word of mouth, can inform an understanding of how audiences are receiving information about the nature of community collaborations (Kabassi, 2016; Lin, 2011; O'Donoghue, 2010). One study by Padilla-Meléndez & Del Águila-Obra (2013) showed museums with high numbers of visitors also tend to have websites with good Alexa ratings (a tool for ranking usage among all websites) and medium-to-high levels of social media followers. The authors of this study posit that websites are not substituting the museum experience but enhancing it. So, even if there is not enough data to fully understand public reception of web-based museum communications, there is evidence that visitors use online tools to inform their experience.

Implications for collaborations

There are several avenues for museums to communicate about their collaborative work. However, like in other models of exhibit creation, a lot the information about how they are put together remains behind closed doors, is not fully disclosed, or is secondary to other messaging in or about the exhibit. Museum visitors may not even be aware that collaborations are happening, or if they are, to what extent. What is the best way for museums to leverage these collaborations to change perceptions of the museums? What effect might that have on the museum's ability to affect social change? And is there a link between outcomes and marketing or communication?

Clearly, anyone wanting visitors to engage with the collaborative aspects of museum work will need to take into account how museum learning works and the museum environment that contributes to this learning. To that end, it is helpful to examine studies that have tested for visitor reception of new information, as well as those that discuss ways that collaborative

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exhibits have communicated to visitors about the processes behind them and the visitor reception of those messages.

One non-collaborative exhibit that was evaluated for its ability to persuade visitors was *The Power of Maps* at the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design. Three main factors determined whether visitors' opinions aligned with intended messages of exhibit: occupation, whether they came to view the specific exhibit (i.e. had heard about it before and were interested in visiting), and experience in the exhibit (Doering et al., 1999). Persuasion in the exhibit was mostly text-based and messages were repeated throughout. However, the researchers also collected data about where visitors had heard about the exhibit, and so conjectured that some visitors accepted the exhibit's message based on word-of-mouth and media reports, or were more likely to visit because their beliefs already aligned. The study's authors found that the exhibit did change visitors' opinions about the subject, although the magnitude was small. However, visitors may have also been influenced by what they heard about the exhibit before they came.

As far as analyzing visitor's reception of messages specifically about collaborative processes in museum exhibits, there have been a few studies done on this topic. At the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, visitors that interacted with components of a collaborative project with indigenous and First Nations people, *A Partnership of Peoples*, were surveyed and interviewed (Schultz, 2011). Nine of the twelve visitors interviewed understood museum collaboration as a partnership with other institutions, rather than a way for communities or individuals outside of the museum to have a voice. The study also revealed visitors missed clues to the "presence of contemporary people" (p. 8), although there was information about their involvement throughout the museum. Schultz also looked at the visitor comment books for the Museum of Anthropology's *Proud to be Musqueam* exhibit and found

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that visitors recognized the agency of Musqueam participants in this exhibit. She attributes this to first-person text and the informal style of the exhibit. She performed this study as a comparison to other comment books for other collaborative exhibits at that museum.

In Susan Ashley's 2011 study on the exhibit *Next Stop Freedom*, a collaboration among African Canadians, Parks Canada, and the Ontario Black History Society, she concludes that the lack of connection between the presentation and content of the exhibit led to zero audience awareness of the process behind it (2011). She writes that as the "process of production was invisible to viewers," there was no way to "enter a dialogue" with the collaborators (p. 200), and concludes with wondering how "to engage a sense of exchange between producers and viewers" (p. 201).

Miriam Kahn's 2000 paper on *Pacific Voices* at the Burke Museum of Natural History in Seattle also discusses visitor reception of collaborative exhibits. The 8-year project involved many different representatives from various Pacific Rim cultures with the goal to "teach about, revitalize, and inspire their cultures" (p. 61). She found that only one-third of visitors recognized the collaborative effort. Although the community participants were happy with the final product and the process, a third of visitors didn't see the contemporary nature of the exhibit, but thought it was about cultures of the past.

Krmpotich and Anderson's 2005 study on *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary found that visitors did not, for the most part, recognize the collaborative work that went into the exhibit. This is despite the fact that there is a panel directly describing the process, video of contemporary people talking about issues for their Blackfoot communities and their cultures, portraits of the participants in the exhibit, and the presence of first-person text throughout the exhibit. Of the four key exhibit messages designated by its

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creators, two related directly to visitors understanding that the Blackfoot were telling their own stories. Visitors were asked if they saw evidence of collaboration in the exhibit after they were told that the museum worked with Blackfoot community elders as partners on the project. The study's authors found that, while most visitors were able to point out evidence of collaboration in the exhibits after the nature of the project was explained to them, they did not initially understand the project to be a vehicle for the Blackfoot participants' agency in telling their own stories and representing themselves within the museum. This leads to further questions regarding the purpose and design of evaluations of visitor reception of collaborations within museums.

Evaluation models for museums and collaborations

What measures have been used to determine whether or not an exhibit dealing with marginalized worldviews and collaboration were successful? Many studies use ethnographic methods to gather data on visitor outcomes but have various measures for success. Doering et al. (1997) used surveys to determine whether previous experience had any bearing on what visitors saw as the intent of the exhibit its relation to them. Susan Ashley (2011) analyzed the content and presentation of the *Next Stop Freedom Exhibit*, in terms of its effectiveness in conveying the intents of its creators and used visitor interviews and questionnaires to gauge visitor reception of the exhibit. Simon (2011) used visitor books to analyze reactions for problematic responses. Similarly, Hughes (2003) looked at curator's statements, wall texts, visitor comments, and critical reviews to determine ethical issues with the exhibit examined. Schultz (2011) used observations, surveys, and interviews to determine whether visitors grasped one specific aspect of the exhibits.

In terms of assessing collaborations in general, two models come from Margerum (2011) and Marek, Brock, and Savila (2015). Margerum (2011) writes that collaborative outcomes are

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difficult to measure because the overarching goals may not be achieved for a long time. Instead, he focuses on the plans, strategies, or agreements created by coalition groups for factors that are likely to determine success. Another model for measuring collaboration success has been developed by Marek, Brock, and Savila (2015) as a seven-factor assessment of collaborative groups. Factors for assessment include context, members, process and organization, communication, function, resources, and leadership.

There are many studies that focus on methods for measuring visitor outcomes at museums in general and the factors that affect visitor learning (Krmopotich & Anderson, 2005; Allen et al., 2007). Doering et al. (1999) found repetition of message an effective tool for influencing visitor outcomes. External factors, such as current political events, can play a role, as can visitor expectation, preferred visit outcomes, and visitor occupation (Doering et al., 1997) (Doering et al., 1999). Social context and personal interaction were found to be important factors determining visitor outcomes (Schultz, 2011). Falk and Dierking (2013), as has been discussed, emphasize the primacy of the visitor's previous knowledge and preferences, as well as their motivation for attending. as the most important factors driving their museum experience.

In terms of evaluation paradigms, Andrew Pekarik (2010) has critiqued an outcome-based model for museum evaluation as reinforcing the status quo, as measurable outcomes are usually set by staff and determined for the exhibit before it is created, and also limit staff ability to gather from visitors what may be the most pertinent information. In a collaborative exhibit model, however, the outcomes may be determined by the community partners, with guidance from the museum, or between the partners and the museum. Janet Marstine (2012) also critiques quantitative measures as not including “the nuance and complexity to represent qualitative aims such as social responsibility” (p. 11). Her critique is housed within her promotion of the practice

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of radical transparency as a way to create more informed experiences in the museum environment, assessment tools for museum staff, and critical thinking about museum practice for all.

Considering that both the collaborative process and the exhibit environment are complex in their processes, inputs, and outputs, involving multiple points of communication and actors, designing an evaluation method for collaboratively-created exhibits likely requires more considerations than an evaluation of either a collaborative process or an exhibit alone. First, it is important to evaluate the process because museums are often defining these projects as challenging the status-quo, not an easy task for large, mainstream institutions that have always done things a particular way. Second, it is important to evaluate the products of the process – the plans and documents generated during the collaborative process. Examination of these types of documents can reveal something about the inter-workings of the collaboration and could indicate future success in how aligned or clearly goals, roles and responsibilities, and messaging are stated across documents. Last, an open-ended model of visitor reception evaluation can be used to allow for a wide variety of input and the possibility of unexpected outcomes, as recommended by Pekarik (2010), Allen et al. (2007) and Schneider and Cheslock (2003)

The conundrum is the conflict between the critique of a specific, outcome-based model of evaluation and creating a workable tool that tells the researcher what they want to know. As has been seen, visitors have varied definitions of collaboration and perhaps a weak understanding of how exhibits are created. A model of visitor-based evaluation that is completely open-ended on this subject is likely to be skewed by the language of collaboration; if visitors have a poor understanding of the subject it will be difficult to question them about it and analyze answers in a way that truthfully gets at the heart of visitor understanding of the collaborative exhibit process.

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These issues were taken into account when designing the survey instrument for this study; it was hoped to create a line of questioning that was both specific and open-ended in order to attempt to understand how visitors viewed agency and decision-making in the exhibit within the timeframe of the brief questionnaire and using questions that were easy for visitors to understand.

Conclusion

If each museum visitor must be looked at as an individual, and, considering the vast number of variables involved, museums cannot control visitor experiences. What can museums do to most effectively present new narratives that have previously not been included in their exhibits? The research shows that the biggest factors determining visitor outcomes are previous experiences (pre-museum visit) and social interactions (during the visit). Can the museum both produce information for the external context that helps visitors understand the new museum experience and create social environment that engages visitors on a personal level with a variety of viewpoints? And will these factors prove important through the visitor survey in this study?

Synthesizing the literature, although there is an overwhelming number of factors driving visitor reception of museum communications and public perception, it seems that some aspects have been shown to be particularly effective points of focus. The social context has a huge effect on experiences while in a museum, pre-visit expectations shaped by the information present and personal values affects people's decision to visit, and word of mouth and public relations are the most effective tools for influencing behavior. This information can help drive efforts to engage visitors with museums' collaborative exhibit work. In the very least, it points to a need for greater scrutiny of this specific intersection of visitor experience and collaborative exhibits and the implications for evaluations of these exhibits.

CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDY DATA: PORTLAND ART MUSEUM

Exhibit collaboration processes

I conducted interviews with staff and examined planning documents, the museum website, and media articles for information on the collaborative processes behind these exhibits. All three of the exhibits that were examined for this study involve a high degree of collaboration with outside individuals, organizations, and community groups. Two of the three are part of regularly rotating galleries that maintain a consistent level of co-creation with various community groups and artists. These spaces have been set up for the museum to hand over a great deal of control to those outside the museum through somewhat delimited processes that have been refined over time to create systems for collaborating in a timely manner and with a proven record of success. The museum has worked with the main partner on the third exhibit, *Portland Meet Portland*, in the past, and this type of repeated partnership may also contribute to a successful collaboration (Margerum, 2011). Each of the three is part of a pattern of working and partnerships between the museum and community groups or facilitators, rather than one-off projects.

It is important to note that my examination of the collaborative process cannot be considered complete. I only interviewed the staff at the museum that were most involved in the projects, and no other staff members or the community partners involved (although I did use documents written by one community partner for *Portland Meet Portland*). The main purpose of the interviews was to get a general sense of who made decisions, who chose goals for the exhibit, the guidelines laid out by the museum, and which parts of the exhibits were collaborative, rather than a more in-depth process assessment. The focus was on understanding any connection between the process and how the collaboration was communicated to visitors, as well as

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comparing with other case studies. I believe the information I gathered is sufficient to do this, but acknowledge it only contains a narrow perspective.

Interwoven Radiance

The Center for Contemporary Native Art (CCNA) is a space within the Portland Art Museum (PAM) dedicated to co-creating exhibits and programming with the Native artists featured in the gallery. Twice per year, the museum works with selected individual or groups of artists to build an exhibit of their work, with the artists involved in all aspects: content, design, interpretation, and programming. This collaborative technique has resulted in, at various times, text written by artists in their own voices, objects in the permanent collection being displayed in new contexts, text written in Native languages, and historic context added to contemporary works through research completed by the artists. Giving control of most aspects of the exhibit to the artists is central to the purpose of this gallery to create a “community anchor space to foster a deeper understanding of Native American art and artists in the modern world,” (Center for Contemporary Native Art, n.d.).

Through the experience of completing five exhibits so far in the CCNA, the museum has come up with some basic ideas of what will work in the space. Typically, these have come about through trial and error, and mostly have to do with how visiting artists use the museum’s collection in the exhibit and what types of materials they want to bring into the space; because of protective collections guidelines, there are some limits to these facets of the exhibits. The budget is set by the museum, and of course the space itself - the size, lighting, and location within the museum – is a pre-determined aspect of the exhibits. Mike Murawski, director of education and public programs, and the current staff member in charge of managing the gallery, emphasized how important it is to be clear with artists about expectations and what types of things may be

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required to go through an approval process at the museum. He also lets the artists know what has worked and not worked in the past. Namely, a couple of issues have come up around artists wanting to use natural materials in the same cases as collection objects, which museum conservators were not able to manage without compromising the preservation of the object (M. Murawski, personal communication, March 19, 2018).

The idea for *Interwoven Radiance* was based on a relationship already established between the museum and Lily Hope, the central organizer and collaborator, through working with her on a different exhibit. PAM had also worked with her husband, Ishmael Hope in the past. Because the original exhibit was put on hold, Murawski wanted to work with Lily Hope on an alternative in the meantime. She agreed and then reached out to other weavers in Alaska to add to the number of artists included in the exhibit. Hope then wrote the exhibit proposal, through which she established the artists who would be included and described her guiding ideas behind the exhibit. The purpose of the project was to highlight and increase recognition of the artistry of Chilkat and Ravenstail weavers, to demonstrate the lineage of female weavers and teachers, and to show Tlingit weaving traditions as connected to contemporary practice. This proposal was given to the museum's Native Art Advisory Board, a seven-member group of local indigenous community leaders and artists, for approval. (M. Murawski, personal communication, March 19, 2018).

Hope came up with the exhibit title, exhibit content, and video content, choosing a videographer from Alaska to tape an interview with her. A PAM videographer then worked with other museum staff to edit the video down to an appropriate length for the exhibit and getting Hope's approval on the final product. Hope also made a lot of the decisions regarding how the weavings were displayed, including the use of and look of the mannequin forms, the way that the

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room was split between Ravenstail and Chilkat weaving styles, and constant consultation with Samantha Springer, PAM's conservator on the project. The exhibit took five months to complete, but it is important to note that time had already been put in by the museum and Hope on building a relationship previously. Murawski was involved as the museum representative and facilitator, as there is currently no Native American art curator at the museum. He has characterized the working relationship as Hope providing the big ideas, connections to her community, expertise on the art, guidance on display, and detailed decision-making on the mannequin displays. The museum provided the space, access to funds, video editors, expertise in how to put together an exhibit, and conservation skills. He described the collaborative process as falling halfway between a fully collaborative exhibit and a one that is completely in the hands of community groups (personal communication, March 19, 2018).

Hope reviewed each aspect of the exhibit as it continued to be designed and offered approval or feedback on everything. This is an important aspect of the CCNA – that it provides a place for artists who don't have experience as curators the tools to put together an exhibit; museum staff helped Hope, for example, with creating an exhibit checklist, submitting her proposal, and ideas for how to display the objects (M. Murawski, personal communication, March 19, 2018).

Many other people both in and outside the museum were involved in making this exhibit happen. The Native Arts and Cultures Foundation and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde contributed funding to the project. Members of the Alaskan Tlingit community participated in the opening ceremony, as did members of the Native Art Advisory Board (the opening was completely planned by these groups, with little involvement from the museum). The Native American Art Council (not to be confused with the Advisory Board), a group of patrons that

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work to support the Native Art galleries at the museum, also financially backed the exhibit. In all, Murawski estimates that as many as 50 people may have been involved in the planning and programming, with hundreds more connecting via programs and visiting the space. Considering the size of the gallery, Murawski pointed out, “It’s interesting to think about how much impact we have per square foot...if we thought about that with all our exhibition spaces, how much more impact would we get out of them if we were saying, ‘this space is meant to connect people,’” (personal communication, March 19, 2018).

Object Stories: Invisible Me

The Object Stories gallery was started in 2010 to bring new voices and interpretive perspectives into PAM. Modeled after StoryCorps, the national oral history project, visitors to the museum could step into a booth in the gallery and record answers to prompts about a personal object or an item in the collection (Ancelet, J., Butler, S., & Ong, A., 2010; K. Bayans, personal communication, March 26, 2018). Exhibits in the space contained objects from the museum’s collections and were connected with other temporary exhibits in the museum. This evolved over time to become a process of working with specific community partners and individuals to create exhibits centered around their lived experiences. When she began working on the project in 2013, Kristin Bayans, manager of interpretive media at the museum, “started to look at Objects Stories as a way to really focus on centering community voice and community perspective inside of the institution” (personal communication, March 26, 2018).

The current process for creating Object Stories exhibits involves several stages. Bayans, who manages the gallery, considers timely and relevant topics that may be a good fit for the Object Stories gallery and then comes up with a general idea of a related community that may be interested in participating. As part of an evolving process, she is currently working on ways to

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open this system to include more decision makers in this part of planning for the exhibits. After a topic and possible community is chosen, she gathers a group of stakeholders that can assist in refining the idea for the exhibit and reach out to potential participants. Once participants have been secured, an exhibition development workshop follows, where they learn about the project and the museum, meet each other, and talk about developing the theme, big ideas, and goals of the exhibit. Transportation and food are paid for by the museum, and participants also get a stipend. Later, Bayans and a technician will interview the storytellers in a location of their choice and take photographs. The workshop is a way to have a dialogue about the exhibit but also get the participants prepared for what they will talk about in their interviews, with the theme for the exhibit in mind. Interview questions are determined beforehand by Bayans (and others, depending on the project). Audio is edited at the museum, with participants giving feedback through two rounds of drafts. They are also able to choose the photos that will accompany the audio. Other decisions are often made with participants over email and other online tools, or in other in-person meetings, and the participants write their object labels, contribute to the introduction panel, and give input on programming and visitor participation aspects of the exhibit. This is, however, just a broad outline of the process, which changes from exhibit to exhibit depending on the population and subject matter involved. The intent is for the process to be flexible and organic in order to be responsive to needs and interests.

In the case of *Invisible Me*, Bayans connected first with frequent collaborator Paul Iarrobino, a professional storyteller, to help find agencies that might be interested in giving input and helping to find participants. They reached out to social services organizations but found recruitment difficult because of confidentiality issues and not having direct access to those who might be interested in the project. Bayans also talked with the Invisible Disabilities Project in

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California and was connected to Oregon Arts Leaders for Inclusion, a local roundtable of arts professionals that work on access in the arts, by Sarah Lampen, docent and access programs manager at PAM. One of these roundtable participants, Cheryl Green, a documentary filmmaker that also has disabilities, was hired on as a consultant for the project. Because of the difficulty in reaching participants through agencies, Bayans and her colleagues relied on word-of-mouth to find people who were interested in sharing their stories. So, in this case, instead of a single community roundtable session to help shape the exhibit and find participants, Bayans had to rely more on a core working group and their contacts, along with input from other organizations.

Once the participants were contacted, they met at the museum for the exhibition development workshop and to talk about the plans for the exhibit. Together, this group brainstormed the big ideas, themes, and goals that would guide the exhibit. After the meeting, the participants continued to work together on refining the exhibit messaging and themes through a group discussion using Google Drive. Interview questions for the storytellers were crafted by Bayans, Green, and Iarrobino and were both broad and specific to allow for a variety of types of input. Green was instrumental in this process, as someone who has extensive experience interviewing people with disabilities, especially through her work as a documentary filmmaker and other media projects. Participants chose the objects to feature in the exhibit, wrote the content for the object labels, gave feedback on the audio interviews, were involved in writing the introduction panel, and gave input on programming. They also guided the visitor participation section: the storytellers wanted to do something with pins or pinning disabilities on a person, so Bayans came up with a few concepts that aligned with that idea but was also based on her experience with creating engaging exhibits. She then proposed these ideas to the group, (K. Bayans, personal communication, March 26, 2018).

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The collaborative process of Object Stories has the added outcomes of building capacity for participants, connecting them to resources, and creating or strengthening bonds among related organizations or people. This is another major goal for the project, according to Bayans: “I want people to feel more connected to the experience, and then I also want them to feel like they’ve learned something through this process, that they now have a tool to be able to talk about themselves differently” (personal communication, March 26, 2018). They can meet other folks with similar experiences, gain skills for talking about those experiences, and possibly learn about other resources in the community that they can access.

Some participants are more active in the decision-making process than others, and another constraint for the project is time: like many collaborative projects, deadlines can affect participation and decision-making. After the initial meetings with participants, Bayans at times has to make decisions as best she can, based on the input she has if no one has gotten back to her with a definitive decision on a particular issue. Other times, only a few in the group actively give input with others approving the work. Bayans emphasizes that she is always very clear with participants about what decisions are being made and why (personal communication, March 26, 2018).

There are certain aspects of Object Stories exhibits that are predetermined – the look of the panels and labels, the size of the exhibit, and the general exhibit components that include audio recordings of stories, objects chosen by participants, and some form of visitor participation. The interview questions are not chosen by the people featured in the exhibit, but, at least in the case of *Invisible Me*, were developed together by Bayans, Green, and Iarrobino. The museum staff edits the recordings (with input from participants). However, the goals of the exhibit, the main ideas, the messaging, programming, and community engagement activities are

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either driven by the community participants, or they have the opportunity to lead those components.

Portland Meet Portland

This interpretive exhibit came about because the museum wanted *Common Ground* to include a local connection and “be part of our museum’s advocacy for social justice and social action” (M. Murawski, personal communication, April 12, 2018). The museum already had a relationship with the organization Portland Meet Portland through a previous Object Stories project. Portland Meet Portland’s executive director, Manuel Padilla, had a huge role in the collaboration, characterizing his organization’s role as a “community partner in residence” (“An interview”, 2018). The museum also connected with Kaykay Wah, a student at Portland Community College who is also involved in Portland Meet Portland among other related organizations; she worked extensively on one section of the exhibit focused on her Karen community. Other collaborators included individuals from the Portland refugee community, a group of Karen weavers called Weaving Together, and a long list of relevant organizations. Together with museum staff, these participants worked to find focus and direction for the exhibit, including big ideas and key concepts. They also made specific decisions, for example choosing the books to include for the in-exhibit reading nook, programming ideas, and deciding on the content of a map of Portland showing sites significant to participants. Wah made the decisions about her section, choosing the people featured, what questions to ask them, and the images she used. The Weaving Together members chose which of their weavings would be in the exhibit. *Common Ground* curator Julia Dolan and artist Fazal Sheik’s list of frameworks for the larger exhibit were also part of the conversation. Padilla and Portland Meet Portland as a whole continued to be heavily involved in outreach, programming, and creating guidance for docents,

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educators, and students. All elements of the exhibit were collaboratively created with Portland Meet Portland or other specific people featured. Ideas and learning goals were generated with the community partners, then organized into options by Bayans with images of design ideas. Padilla had decision-making power in nearly every aspect, and then the design team at the museum worked to make the final ideas into reality with the stories and content gathered through the work of Portland Meet Portland, Wah, Weaving Together, and the other partners and individuals that worked on the exhibit (M. Murawski, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Padilla's words can be seen in the "Finding Common Ground" handout that was in the exhibit for visitors to take, and on the museum website in "An interview with Portland Meet Portland's Manuel Padilla," where he is quoted as saying, "One of the most fundamental points I want to stress is the museum's direct, hands on participation with refugee community members. This experience was crucial to the cross-cultural learning and growth of everyone involved" (2018). In reading more of his comments in this interview regarding cross-cultural exchange, his influence on the big ideas driving the exhibit are clear and were also echoed in the contributions of other participants. (M. Murawski, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Several other partners that were part of guiding the exhibit also contributed to programming. The Miller Family Free Day on March 10, 2018, focused on *Common Ground* and the interpretive exhibit, with involvement from many local refugee communities and artists. For example, the South Asian American Arts Festival contributed a poetry reading; Sabina Haque, an artist associated with the Asian Pacific Network of Oregon, installed a pop-up exhibit and conducted an artist talk; and the Weaving Together group that is featured in the exhibit presented weaving demonstrations.

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The *Common Ground* interpretive gallery took 4-5 months to complete; this timeline was surely facilitated by working with a main collaborative partner with which the museum already had a relationship, although many others were involved. Museum staff characterized the decision-making process as falling closer to a fully collaborative project than a hosted exhibit (M. Murawski, personal communication, April 12, 2018).

Environmental scans of the exhibits

Each of the three exhibits in this study occupy unusual spaces within PAM. The museum itself has over 112,000 square feet of gallery space; *Portland Meet Portland* occupies approximately 200 square feet, the Center for Contemporary Native Art is 600 square feet, and the Object Stories gallery is 900 square feet. Using a 24-point list of exhibit aspects to analyze the three galleries show that they each communicate information about who authored the exhibits and whose voices are present.

Interwoven Radiance

Interwoven Radiance, the exhibit in the Center for Contemporary Native Art (CCNA) within PAM, focuses on Chilkat and Ravenstail weaving from the Northwest coast of the United States and Canada. These two styles of weaving come out of traditions in Tsimshian and Tlingit cultures that live on today, and the exhibit highlights both a connection to tradition and contemporary practice. Robes are the most prominent works created in these weaving styles, but other articles are also included in the exhibit. Lily Hope, the artist who organized the exhibit, is featured along with several other prominent weavers. In the introductory panel to the exhibit, she writes, “This exhibition strives to elevate the mastery and ingenuity of women artists of the Northwest coast” (Hope, 2017).

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Interwoven Radiance is the most conventional exhibit of the three that I examined in terms of layout and text yet has many unique aspects that signal to the visitor that the exhibit is co-created. As visitors approach the gallery, there is a panel outside the entrance that describes the purpose of the CCNA and how the exhibits are made. When they continue into the gallery, the title of the exhibit and introductory text appear on the left.

Once inside, Lily Hope's voice and ambient music from a 6-minute, repeating video fill the space – combined, her voice and the music create a calming and meditative feel to the gallery. Hope's is the only voice on the video and it is steadily present throughout. Her voice is also in the introductory panel; although not written in the first person, it is attributed to her. The style and tone of the text doesn't deviate much from what one would find in other exhibits, with some subtle exceptions. For example, the introductory text uses the poetic phrase, "The weavers spin the earth and animal together" (Hope, 2017).

Most objects included in the exhibit are contemporary Chilkat and Ravenstail weavings, both robes and full ensembles. These weavings are made by Lily Hope, Marie Laws, Teri Rofkar, and Clarissa Rizal. The exhibit also contains 19th century leggings, robe, and pattern board, as well as a contemporary community robe made by 46 Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, and non-indigenous weavers and put together by Clarissa Rizal. Object labels are standard to what can be found elsewhere in the museum, again with some subtle differences. Often artists are referred to by their first names (instead of last names only), which hints that they are known personally to the label-writer. Biographical panels on the rear wall of the exhibit honor artists Rofkar and Rizal, both of whom passed away in 2016. Photos on these panels depict the artists wearing their robes in an outdoor landscape. The back wall also contains text acknowledging the

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support of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, and the Native American Arts Council.

Interwoven Radiance contains multiple voices in the text presented, through quotes, attribution, and third-person didactic information. The constantly-playing video with Hope's voice implies her influence and role in the exhibit. Furthermore, the size and layout of the exhibit is intimate; combined with the single entrance-exit and audio, this gives the feeling of a specific, contained world of the Chilkat and Ravenstail weavers. Lastly, the natural light that flows thorough the large skylight sets this space apart from others in the museum. As far as content, the exhibit describes Chilkat and Ravenstail weavings as complex and difficult artforms, practiced mostly by women, and that these artists are incorporating new themes and, at times, new techniques into traditional practices. Systems of tradition are familial, as illustrated through the lineage of the artists present: Clarissa Rizal is the mother of Lily Hope; Marie Laws is the mother of Teri Rofkar.

Invisible Me

Invisible Me, the Object Stories exhibit focused on people who have invisible disabilities, is broken into two sections by a through-way to a hall leading to bathrooms, a wheelchair ramp, and additional museum galleries. The introductory panel and visitor engagement section is to the right as you enter the gallery from the main museum entrance area; the objects and personal stories of the people featured in the exhibit are to the left, along with the throughway leading to the modern wing of the museum. As visitors enter the exhibit from the stairway, they see the red introductory panel for the exhibit, which describes invisible disabilities and that the exhibit was co-created with the people who are featured. To the right of the panel is a station where visitors are invited to answer the questions, "What for you creates an invisible disability?" and "How

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have you lived with the condition?” (*Invisible Me*, 2018) on post-it notes and stick them on the wall, where others can read their responses. On the wall next to the post-it station is a section with wearable buttons, the text on the wall reading “Make it visible,” and inviting visitors to take and wear a button from the wall to “advance the dialogue about disability and its impact on our lives” (*Invisible Me*, 2018).

The other section of the exhibit, to the left of these elements, contains personal objects of the people featured in the exhibit, displayed behind glass, along with photos of the co-creators, the title of their story (which was pulled from the content they provided), and descriptions of their objects. The set-up of this part of the exhibit is as though each glass case is a mini-exhibit of the way each participant experiences, interacts with, and copes with their disabilities. Object labels are written in the first-person voice of participants. Additionally, one wall contains text that describes a little about the museum’s intentions for the gallery in a general way, “We are a museum for all. Beyond simply opening our doors, this means actively pursuing ways to make our museum more accessible to more people, celebrating everyone’s life experiences, voices, and stories; and promoting social justice here in our own community and beyond” (*Invisible Me*, 2018). In the center of this space is a two-person seating area plus two iPad stations with headphones. The iPads contain videos with more of the co-creators’ stories, told in their own voices and also captioned for viewers to read along.

There is some variety to the tone and feel of the exhibit. There is a cohesiveness to its design - a general uniformity to the label style, the photo and name panels, the displays of objects, and the visitor engagement components. At the same time, it seems very personal because of the nature of the objects on display, and the participant’s stories. There is a balance between the formalized structure and the very obviously personal objects and the words used to

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describe them. The text contains first-person text from each person featured, third-person explanatory information, and second-person invitation to engage with the post-its and pins. There are explicit questions posed to visitors in the post-it station.

Overall, the space itself feels different from other areas of the museum for several reasons. The interactive options set it apart – there are things you can touch or take with you. The location in the throughway between the two wings of the museum give it a transitory feel; the adjacent bathrooms, meeting room, and Whitsell Auditorium (where films are shown) contribute to sense of waiting or resting before or after other activity. It lacks the small-space and closed-off intimacy of the other exhibits in this study. For example, one wall is almost entirely open to the rest of the walkway to the modern wing of the museum and you can see sculptures and paintings down this passage, along with the stairwell on the far side of the throughway that leads to the other half of the museum.

Portland Meet Portland

Portland Meet Portland comes at the end of the exhibit *Common Ground*, a collection of works by the photographer Fazal Sheikh, who has worked extensively to capture portraits and stories of refugees and others who are experiencing displacement. Many of these stories are violent, terrifying, and upsetting. As a finale, the *Portland Meet Portland* interpretive gallery offers some respite from the intensity of Sheikh's photographs. The most striking difference is how colorful it is – the wall you can see from the *Common Ground* exhibit is painted bright golden yellow and contains the highly visible title and introductory panel as well as a map of Portland. To the right of this wall is a display of books on refugee experiences. Above those, a series of weavings by a group of Karen (a Myanmar ethnic group) weavers in Portland, with pinks, reds, blue, greens, and purples stretching all the way to the ceiling. Likewise, as visitors

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walk around the room, they can see that all the photographs in this space are in color. The gallery contains a variety of seating options – a couch, a couple of regular museum chairs, and a few low cushion-like stools – that works well for groups of people to sit down and talk or process what they have just seen. It is clear that there is a different purpose to this space within the context of *Common Ground*.

Although there is a more colorful, perhaps celebratory, feel to the interpretive exhibit, there is still quite a lot packed into this small space. The markers on a map of Portland correspond with a collection of 4”x 8” cards that are stored in a plastic shelf below the map. Each card contains a picture of a place in Portland with a description written by a refugee, first in their handwriting and native language on the front, then translated into English on the reverse. Participants were asked: “Where do you feel welcome in Portland?”, “Where do you feel isolated, or unwelcome in Portland?”, and “Where do you find community in Portland?” (*Portland Meet Portland*, 2018). Another wall contains a project completed by collaborator Kaykay Wah about members of her Karen refugee community. The display contains her description of the project, photographs of three Karen refugee women, a label with each woman’s name and a few sentences about them. Below there is a long shelf with a book under each woman’s photograph, with more details about their experiences. Visitors are encouraged to flip through these books and add questions of their own; these questions will be given to the women to answer if they choose. Through the duration of the exhibit, the photographs and stories will be changed out to include more community members’ stories. On the other side of the gallery entrance is a wall panel describing the Karen weavings, the process for making them, and text about and photos of the group of Karen weavers that produced them.

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The text within the exhibit contains multiple points of view: the introductory text and description of the weavers is in third-person; Kaykay Wah's description of her project, the three women's stories, and the descriptions of places in Portland on the map cards are all in first-person; second-person text is used to ask questions of visitors. The introductory text is a direct appeal to visitors: "This is a snapshot in the everyday life of refugees in Portland...Some are newcomers and others have been here longer than you and your family...They help to define this city, and each has a unique and personal experience" (*Portland Meet Portland*, 2018). The overall tone and feel is personal and informal - as exemplified by main text panel as you walk in, the colors in the room, the small stool-like chairs in addition to regular seating, and the question and answer format of the notebooks. After walking through *Common Ground*, *Portland Meet Portland* feels like a place to sit, reflect, and take a break. But it is so much more – encouraging a direct dialogue between refugees in Portland and residents.

Visitor intercept survey

I surveyed 55 visitors to the museum's three exhibits over four weekends, including during regular open hours on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, as well as special extended hours on two Fridays and a free family day on one Saturday. Interviews took between five and seven minutes each and were given verbally so that respondents could more easily answer open-ended questions and interactions could be conversational. Most interviews took place within the exhibits so that respondents could reference specific items within the exhibit if they wanted. Survey answers were entered into a spreadsheet and coded based on patterns in the data. Responses were compared against my analysis of the exhibits to see if they matched my own observations.

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Visitor Recognition of Collaboration				
	Total Number Interviewed	Objects chosen by someone other than museum (%)	Text written by someone other than museum (%)	Recognized collaboration or more than one exhibit creator (%)
Interwoven Radiance	16	56%	63%	31%
Invisible Me	20	80%	85%	40%
Portland Meet Portland	19	63%	84%	47%
TOTAL	55	67%	78%	40%

Figure 1: Visitor recognition of collaborators outside of the museum making decisions about the exhibits

Figure 1 shows that most visitors recognized an outside collaborator made decisions about what went into the exhibits – either by writing the text or choosing the objects on display. Visitors had the easiest time seeing these outside voices in *Invisible Me* and *Portland Meet Portland*. Overall, 40% of visitors surveyed offered, without prompting, that they thought the exhibit was the creation of more than one person or group of people, with at least one of those actors being someone outside of the museum. This was not a specific question on the survey, visitors were only asked who they thought wrote the text and who they thought chose the objects. Through further analysis, 87% of all visitors surveyed recognized that either the text or the objects were chosen by someone outside the museum, while 58% recognized that both were.

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Visitors who said someone other than the museum wrote the text, either alone or in combination with museum staff				
Reason for Answer	All Exhibits	Interwoven Radiance	Invisible Me	Portland Meet Portland
first person text	16	0	9	7
other content of text	6	4	1	1
style of writing	7	1	5	1
the way the exhibit is set up	6	2	1	3
other personal touches in the exhibit (handwriting/voice)	4	0	0	4
amount of detail in text	3	1	0	2
assumption about how museums work	3	3	0	0
multi-vocal	3	0	2	1
assumption about people featured	2	0	0	2
personal content of exhibit in general	2	1	1	0
text explicitly says so	3	0	0	3
personal content of the text	2	0	0	2
don't know/ didn't answer	1	1	0	0

Figure 2: Reasons given by visitors regarding who they thought wrote the text in the exhibits. Some visitors gave more than one response.

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Visitors who said someone other than the museum chose the objects, either alone or with museum staff				
Reason for Answer	All Exhibits	Interwoven Radiance	Invisible Me	Portland Meet Portland
type of objects	10	2	8	0
general content of text	8	2	4	2
video/photo content	8	3	2	3
assumption of how museums work	5	1	2	2
explicit content in text	4	0	0	4
the way the exhibit is set up	3	0	3	0
detail/specificity of exhibit content	2	1	0	1
need an "outsider" to translate to museum audience	2	2	0	0
because of the nature of a group exhibit/needing someone to organize it	1	0	0	1
feel of the exhibit	1	1	0	0
outside knowledge of exhibit subject	1	1	0	0
pre-visit information on exhibit	1	0	1	0

Figure 3: Reasons given by visitors regarding who they thought chose the objects in the exhibits. Some visitors gave more than one response.

After visitors were asked who they thought wrote the text and chose the objects, they were asked why they thought that. Figures 2 and 3 show the reasons given by visitors who thought someone outside of the museum made these decisions. Some visitors gave more than one response to these two questions, and all answers are recorded here. Their answers were coded based on patterns in the data and some of these categories may require some explanation, which will be described here. The term multi-vocal here means that more than one voice is present in

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the exhibit, either through point of view offered in the text or other clues that the visitor picked up on in the exhibit. Visitors whose responses are coded as “other content of text” cited text within the exhibit that described who loaned the objects on display, who sponsored the exhibit, general descriptions of the objects or exhibit, and the content of visitor engagement components. Four visitors to the *Portland Meet Portland* exhibit specifically cited the photo cards on which refugees had written about their experiences in their own handwriting.

In general, most people recognized that the text was written by someone other than museum staff, so there was no strong correlation between the amount of text that visitors read and who they thought wrote the text. An exception was those who said they read all of the text in the exhibit also all said that someone outside of the museum wrote the text. There was also no recognizable correlation between how often visitors came to museums and whether or not they thought someone outside the museum chose the objects or wrote the text in the three exhibits.

Visitors' Pre-Visit Information		
	Total Number Interviewed	Learned About Exhibit Before Entering
Interwoven Radiance	16	3
Invisible Me	20	1
Portland Meet Portland	19	12
TOTAL	55	16

Figure 4: Visitors who heard about the exhibits before they visited.

During the process of conducting the surveys, it became clear that most visitors had not read or heard about the exhibits before walking into them. Most that did hear about the exhibit beforehand were surveyed in the *Portland Meet Portland* exhibit. Of those, only two

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remembered hearing anything about the localized section of the larger *Common Ground* exhibit; most only had heard about *Common Ground* in general. In general, all visitors who said they heard something about the exhibits beforehand were more likely to recognize the influence of those outside of the museum in the three exhibits. They were also more likely to be frequent museum visitors, with 69% of those who heard about the exhibits beforehand saying they visited museums 6 or more times per year and only 35% of all of the visitors surveyed saying they visited museums 6 or more times per year.

Text analysis of museum communications outside of exhibits

I also examined a sampling of museum communications both inside and outside the museum (but all outside of the exhibits). These included brochures, flyers, pamphlets, website content, media articles, email newsletters, member magazines, social media posts, and content on other organizations' websites. In total I looked at 20 pieces of communication that had content about the three exhibits, and an additional 27 Facebook posts.

The only social media platform I looked at was Facebook because there is more text content than on other social media platforms. I also assume that museum messaging is going to be similar, as far as the intent behind the message, across platforms, so it is likely representative. In general, the Facebook posts didn't mention the collaborative aspects of the exhibits with any frequency. Of the posts mentioning the three exhibits I examined, partnerships, co-creation, collaboration, or decision-making by those outside of the museum was mentioned 25% of the time.

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Figure 5 outlines illustrates the factors that I examined in each of the non-social media communications about the exhibits in this study. Most communications mentioned the collaborative nature of the exhibit, although it was rarely a prominent component of the communication. So, while newsletter articles, media articles, and blog posts often mentioned the collaborative aspect of the exhibits, these texts were rarely about the collaborative process.

Museum Communications - Text Analysis (non-social media only)					
Exhibit	Mentions exhibit*	Mentions the collaboration	Mentions the collaboration in first paragraph	Includes quotes from collaborators	More than one sentence describing collaboration
Interwoven Radiance	5	4	2	3	0
Invisible Me	4	4	2	0	3
Portland Meet Portland	12	8	3	4	4
*Portland Meet Portland data includes mentions of Common Ground, as well.					

Figure 5: Analysis of museum communications outside of the exhibits in this study

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The vast majority of visitors surveyed recognized that someone other than museum staff was involved in making decisions about the objects and text in the exhibits, with the lowest number of visitors recognizing this for *Interwoven Radiance*. Although I learned through my interviews that the choice to present the robes and other ceremonial clothing pieces on mannequins was not typical of the museum, and the layout and content are unquestionably contemporary, of the three exhibits, *Interwoven Radiance* most closely resembles other art galleries found in the museum. This was the only one of the three exhibits that contained both historic and contemporary objects, objects from the museum's collection, and valuable art objects displayed in a manner similar to those elsewhere in the museum. Still, the majority of visitors to this exhibit felt that the text was written and objects chosen, at least in part, by either the people represented in the exhibit or someone else from their communities.

I would like to talk here a little bit about the questions on the survey and why I used the text and objects as indicators for collaboration. In previous studies on visitor reception of information on collaborative exhibits, researchers have found that the public does not understand the nature of collaboration or museum work (Kahn, 2000; Krmpotich, & Anderson, 2005; Schultz, 2011). In my research design, I first wanted to create a visitor intercept survey that would only take about five minutes to complete – because the exhibits I was working with were smaller and unlikely to be the main attraction for visitors, I knew the survey had to be succinct in order to get people to agree to participate. I also wanted to ask some concrete questions about how visitors thought the exhibit was put together and for them to be able to tell me what specifically made them think that. The important point was to discover whether visitors were picking up on the clues within the exhibit that told them it was not created solely by museum

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staff and that community members both worked on and made decisions about the content and design of the exhibits.

Unlike some of the other studies cited that looked specifically at visitor reception of collaborative exhibits (acknowledging that there are only a few), this study showed that the public does pick up on information within the exhibit that shows it was created collaboratively. There are several possible reasons why the results of this study were different from some previous studies. First, the three exhibits at the Portland Art Museum were smaller and more intimate than previously studied exhibits. Previous studies tend to look at larger, permanent exhibits that took several years to create: *Nitsitapiisinni: Our Way of Life* at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary took five years to complete (Krmptich, & Anderson, 2005), “A Partnership of Peoples” renewal project at the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia took approximately nine years to complete (Museum of Anthropology, 2007), *Pacific Voices* at the Burke Museum took eight years (Kahn, 2000). Possibly the smaller venues within the Portland Art Museum compounded several factors that made it easier for visitors to digest intended messaging: physical size, limited complexity in comparison to larger exhibits, control over physical environment of space, ease of creating cohesiveness in a smaller space, and increased impact of repeated messaging in a smaller space. For example, the video that played on repeat inside *Interwoven Radiance* would not have had as big of an impact in a larger space – because of the intimacy of that gallery, visitors were immersed in Lily Hope’s voice constantly while in the exhibit. Additionally, when trying to convey dual messages about both the communities or persons in the exhibit and how those groups are active agents in the exhibit creation process, the greater control over a smaller exhibit size and focus on specific communities and experiences makes it easier for those messages to reach visitors.

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As was discussed earlier, the study on *Nitsitapiisinni* at the Glenbow Museum did find that visitors could point to collaborative elements in that exhibit, but only after researchers explained the nature of the process behind the exhibit. In contrast to Krmpotich and Anderson's (2005) study, the Portland Art Museum survey was designed to be short and not ask visitors to define collaboration, because it was more focused on testing visitor's perception of participant agency in specific exhibit elements, creating questions that were easy for survey respondents to understand, and designing the instrument in a way that would attract the greatest number of participants. Through their line of questioning, Krmpotich and Anderson found that many visitors they spoke to assumed that the exhibition was created by the museum but were also able to identify evidence of collaboration through the exhibit. The authors assert that recognition of voice is not the same as self-representation, and that visitors' assumptions about museum work and lack of understanding of collaborative museum exhibits mean that they cannot fully comprehend the significance of collaborative exhibits. I would contend, however, that it is the recognition of agency within the exhibit that is most important. Perhaps a deeper understanding of how museum exhibits are constructed would help visitors understand the collaborative process. However, examining my own survey design, which asks people who they thought decided on objects and text, visitors were recognizing agency over these main exhibit components. A recommendation would be to design a study that could figure out how to ask about other exhibit components in a way that visitors can understand. I contemplated asking who they thought set the goals or objectives for the exhibit, but as these may be exhibit components that visitors have never thought about before, I felt that it would require more explanation than the timing of my surveys would allow. Krmpotich and Anderson's line of reasoning is that, although visitors recognized signs of collaboration, they didn't really understand what

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collaboration between museums and community groups means, and therefore didn't fully comprehend the nature of the project through the communications within the exhibit. They offer evidence through a quote from a visitor, "I assumed some professional museum people had put this together" (p. 500), but it is likely that the professional museum exhibit designers and other staff did have influence in terms of professional expertise within this fully collaborative project. I don't necessarily disagree with their findings, but it is important to consider the core of what visitors need to understand about these collaborative exhibits. Will they ever recognize full agency without understanding more about museum work? Or is the recognition and understanding of agency a key to visitors having a greater understanding of how exhibits are put together and how the assumed authority of the museum voice can be disrupted?

The vast majority of visitors also said they had not known anything about the exhibits before walking into them. This is likely because these are smaller exhibits, not on the main floor of the museum, and nowhere near as visible inside the museum or in the media as the current main exhibit on LAIKA. The exception was the *Common Ground* exhibit, of which *Portland Meet Portland* was a part. This exhibit is one of the major, featured, rotating exhibits in the museum and since the exhibit had opened only a month before I started conducting surveys, there had been a good amount of recent press, communications coming from the museum, and general buzz. While *Portland Meet Portland* was not the main subject of the sample coverage I looked at, the exhibit-within-an-exhibit was at least mentioned whenever the larger *Common Ground* was talked about in detail. Visitors that did hear about the exhibit beforehand were more likely to recognize the clues in the exhibit that pointed to collaboration, but they were also more likely to be frequent museum visitors. No visitor cited the information they learned beforehand as evidence that others outside of the museum had chosen the objects or wrote the text; there

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wasn't necessarily a causal relationship between hearing about the exhibits beforehand and seeing the collaboration.

A fair assessment of the collaborative processes involved in these exhibits shows that different aspects fall along different areas of the authority spectrum (Appendix B), meaning that decision-making of each detailed aspect of the exhibit creation process is not always the same. While goals were most often set by the community partners, which is arguably the most influential driver of the final product, and much of the content and design aspects were either crafted by the community partners or created in collaboration with museum staff, some of the detailed decisions had to be made by the museum because of the short deadlines in comparison to years-long, large-scale projects. This could be seen, for example, in *Invisible Me* for some design and content aspects within Object Stories exhibits in general. Also, because the groups of participants in Object Stories are individuals, they may each choose how much they participate in the introduction panel and visitor engagement aspects of the exhibit. I agree with staff assessment that all of these exhibits fall between a fully collaborative and a hosted exhibit, with a few aspects falling between full collaboration and consultation. It is important to point out that none of these exhibits were part of a one-time interaction with the people or communities who participated; each had some aspect of prolonged engagement through previous projects or other more indirect connections.

Although previous studies on longer-term collaborative exhibit projects also showed these projects as being important to changing the way the museums involved worked, they are not the only way to create impactful exhibits involving community partners. These expansive projects create growth and change for both the museum and the collaborators involved and can have real impact as far as structural change at the museum and giving space for new voices from

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outside the museum. However, as this study shows, smaller projects that take less time but that are also part of extended relationship-building processes and a menu of community engagement efforts, can have an important impact on how the public sees museum work. I would like to see future studies on how visitors perceive the museum as engaged with the community or as a space for community members to have a voice. Hopefully this could put the visitors' perceptions of the three exhibits I examined into the larger context of perceptions of the museum. Another further area of study would be the refinement of evaluation techniques for collaborative exhibits and the ways that visitors understand these processes. As there can be no assumption that museum visitors collectively have the same definition or understanding of what collaboration is, or the details of museum work, it is important to develop a line of questioning that can get at the heart of how visitors are understanding these exhibits and whether they see participants or collaborators as active agents within the museum space. The questions I devised for this study are an attempt to do this; continued study could refine these techniques further.

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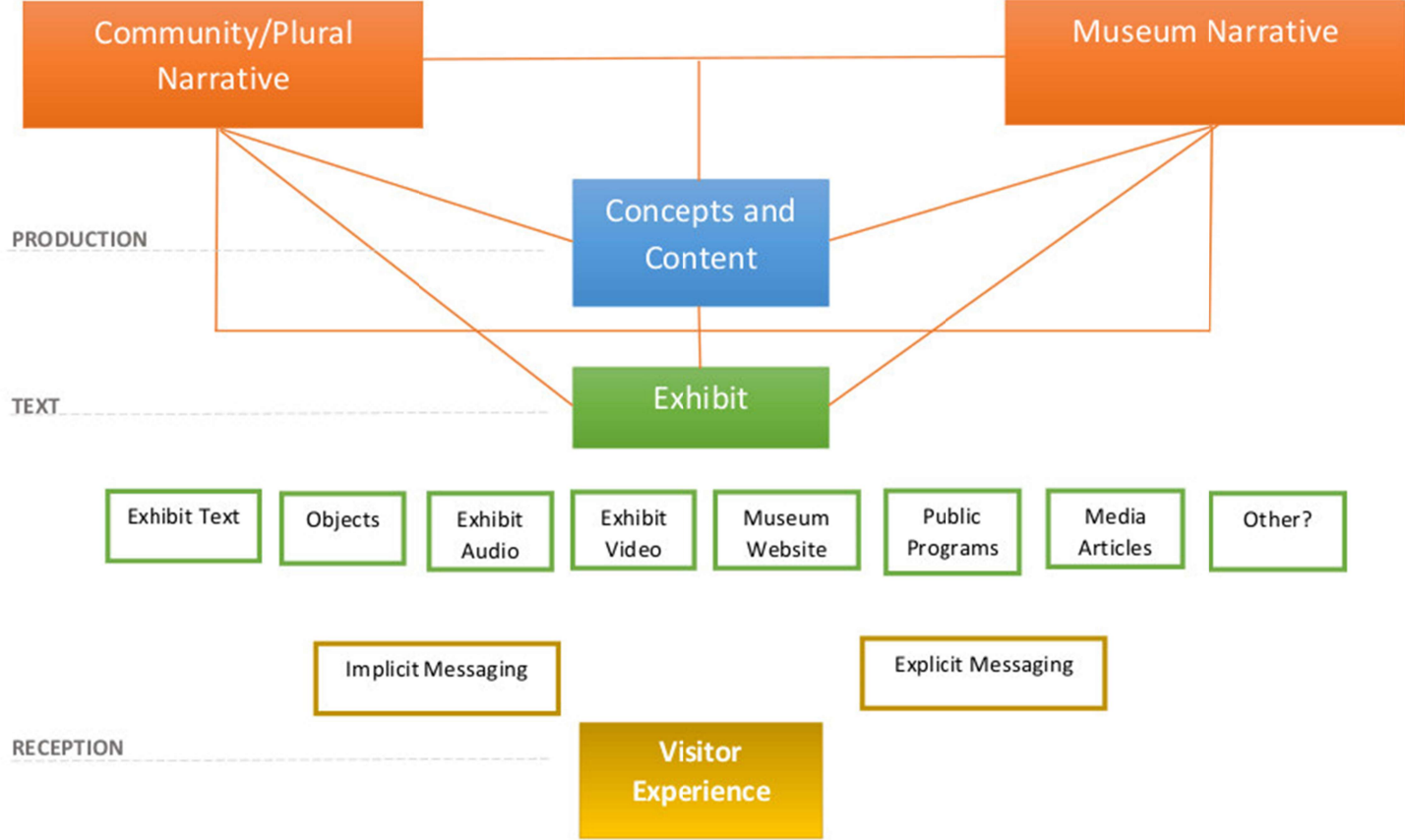
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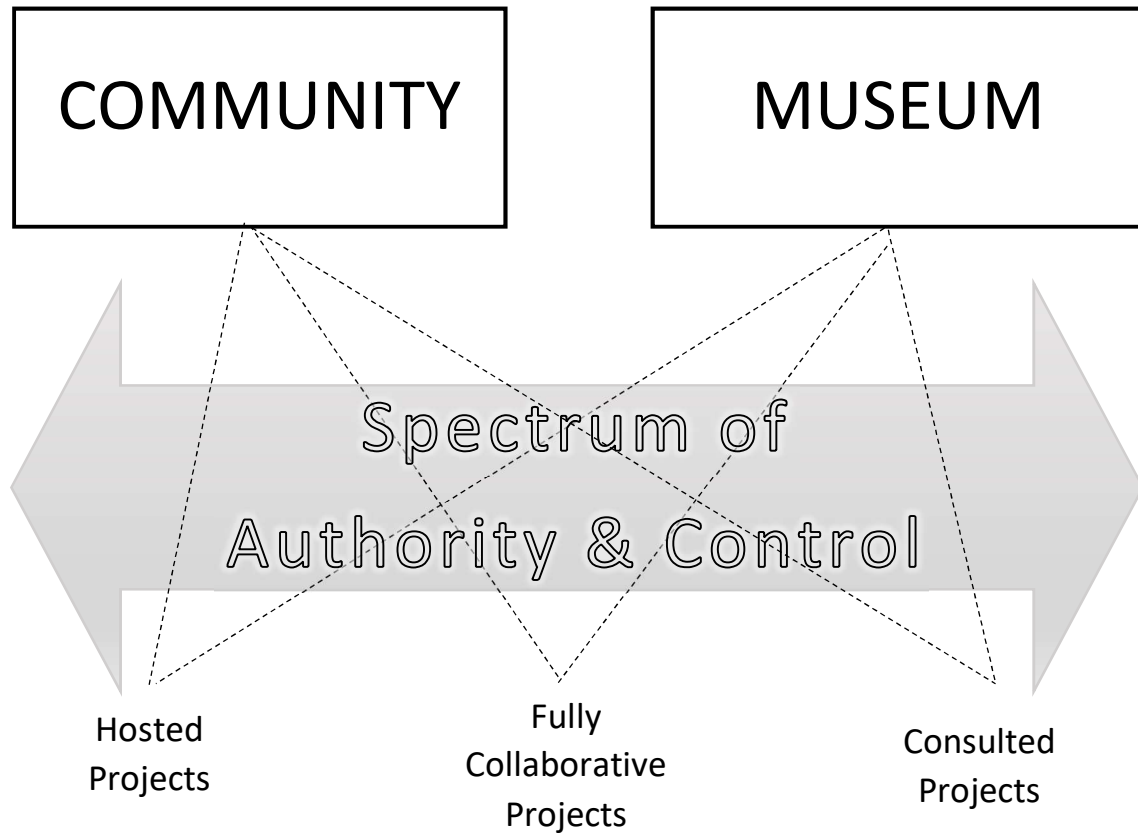
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Appendix A: Components of Production-Text-Reception Model



Appendix B: Spectrum of Authority and Control



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Appendix C: Research Instruments: Visitor Intercept Survey

Portland Art Museum

Gallery:

Thank you for your interest in this research study. This is a multi-part study looking at how visitors react to information in museum exhibits and includes a case study of this gallery. In this last part of the project, I am asking visitors to this exhibit to answer survey questions about how they think this exhibit was created.

As a visitor to this exhibit, you are being asked to participate in a short, anonymous survey that will take no longer than ten minutes to complete. It asks questions about the purpose of your visit and what you thought about the exhibit. I will ask the questions to you verbally and have them available for you to view in print.

No personal information will be requested; this survey is completely anonymous. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. I anticipate that results of this research project will be of value to you as a museum visitor in that it may help museums improve their exhibits. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

Feel free to ask questions at any time during the survey. My contact information will be made available afterword in case you have any questions later.

Do you consent to participate? yes no

How did you hear about this exhibit/gallery?

___ word of mouth ___ museum staff ___ internet
___ radio ___ newspaper ___ other media
___ don't know ___ didn't hear about it before coming in
other Notes:

What information did you gather about this exhibit before visiting, and what was your source for this information?

___about the artists	___about the gallery in general	___none
general visitor information	didn't hear about it before	other

Notes: _____

Any specific reason you wanted to visit this exhibit or anything you hoped to get out of it?

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☐ was recommended by a friend ☐ interest in subject matter in general
☐ to learn something specific ☐ familiar with the artists
☐ to show a friend/family member ☐ other
☐ didn't come for this exhibit

Notes: _____

—

Have you visited this specific space or exhibit in this museum before?

☐ yes ☐ no

Are you in any way related to the artists or any group or person featured in the exhibit?

☐ yes: ☐ direct relation ☐ indirect relation ☐ no

What do you think the main message of this exhibit is?

Who do you think designed this exhibit – **who chose the objects**, how they would be displayed, and how the space was set up?

☐ curator ☐ the museum in general
☐ exhibit designer ☐ the artists
☐ another organization, nonprofit, or community group (not the museum)
☐ the people or groups featured in the exhibit
☐ someone else

Notes: _____

—

Why do you think that? Is there something in the exhibit that makes you think that, or some information you received from another source?

Notes: _____

—

There are ☐ blocks of texts in this exhibit (for example, the exhibit introduction). What percentage of the text do you think you read? ☐ A few ☐ Half ☐ Most ☐ All

Who do you think wrote the text in the exhibit?

 exhibit designer the artists

Notes: _____

Notes: _____

LEARN SOMETHING NEW	CHILD'S EDUCATION	PROFESSIONAL/HOBBY INTEREST
HERITAGE SOCIAL TOURISM	RELAXING	SEE REAL OBJECTS FIRST-HAND

5 or more times per year other: _____

5 or more times per year other: _____

Any other programs you are attending in this space, or any other interactions you've had in here with tours, staff, etc.?

75

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2. Point of view of text & labels
3. Objects/items being displayed
4. Is the text attributed? To whom?
5. Are there photographs? What of? Context given?
6. Are there videos in the exhibit?
7. Any visual info about displayed objects being used outside of exhibit context?
8. Are the objects contemporary or historical?
9. Any supplemental info/handouts/etc.?
10. Overall tone and feel of the exhibit (e.g. personal, clinical, formal, informal)?
11. More than one voice present?
12. Any explicit questions posed?
13. Any implicit questions posed?
14. Any other forms of visitor engagement, or ways the space/exhibit encourages social interaction?
15. Any other explanatory text?
16. Any other signage or info elsewhere in the museum?
17. Docent tours?
18. Does the space seem different from other spaces in the museum?
19. Do the deviations from standard exhibit style of museum encourage interaction or dialogue?
19. Label style
20. Layout of the room?
21. Any other observations?

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Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Staff at Portland Art Museum

Interview Protocol (interviews with staff at case study museum)

Date:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent: ☐ Oral ☐ Written (form) ☐ Audio Recording ☐ OK to Quote

Follow up conducted? Y N

Thank you note sent? Y N

Notes on Interview Context:

Interview Questions

Who was involved in the collaboration, both inside and outside the museum?

Can you describe the collaborative process?

What parts of the exhibit were collaborative, and which weren't (including conception, outcomes, content, and design)?

How long was the collaborative process?

Where on the authority/control scale does this project lie?

What were the intended outcomes of the exhibit?

In what ways does the museum communicate about this collaboration with visitors?

With the wider public?

Were visitor outcome (summative) evaluations conducted on this exhibit?

Are there additional resources that I should examine for this study?

Appendix F: Consent Form - Staff Interview Participants

Visitor Reception in Collaborative Museum Exhibits

Erin Schmith, Principal Investigator
Arts and Administration Program
School of Planning, Public Policy and Management
University of Oregon

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Visitor Reception in Collaborative Museum Exhibits*, conducted by Erin Schmith, a graduate student in the University of Oregon's Arts and Administration Program. The purpose of this study is to determine how museums are communicating with their visitors about their collaborative exhibit work, and whether visitors are receptive to these communications.

A wide body of research exists on how museums collaborate with community partners to create exhibitions and programming; these various methods of collaboration have become common practice as a way to engage a wider range of audience, as well as create greater equity of representation in the museum space. A significant gap exists, however, when it comes to studying how well visitors understand this collaborative work that museums are doing. As collaboration can be used as a transformative process – to enhance knowledge of museum staff and community partners, to change the perspectives present in museum exhibits, and to allow for a more democratized approach to museology – it would seem important for the public to understand this work. As visitors are active receptors and agents in the exhibit process, this study aims to look at how they are being engaged with and understanding museums' collaborative work.

This is a multi-part study that will be looking at the general landscape of what arts and culture museums are doing around this issue, as well as a case study of the Portland Art Museum's Center for Contemporary Native Art. The third phase of the study is to interview key staff at the museum that may be able to shed light on the nature, process, and communications around the case study exhibit. The purpose is to gain knowledge of the nature of the collaboration from a staff perspective, as well as various forms of communication about the exhibit, previous evaluations that may have been done, and any other suggested resources that I should look at.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with the Portland Art Museum and your involvement with the case study exhibit. This interview will take approximately one hour to complete, in person, at the museum or another location that is convenient to you.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. All research records will be stored on a password-protected computer, and hard copies of documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Research records will be retained through completion of this research project for validation purposes and shortly past publication of the master's research project; research records will be destroyed one year after completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and the faculty research adviser will have access to these records.

There are minimal risks (loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality) associated with participating in this study. To maintain credibility of the research, I intend to identify participants and use quotes from participants in the final publication. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below,

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demonstrates your willingness to have your name used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. You will have the opportunity, if you wish, to review any quotes and paraphrasing of your statements prior to publication. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your institution. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the museum field as a whole, and specifically to help practitioners think about engaging visitors with their collaborative exhibit processes. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have questions or want a copy or summary of this study's results, you can contact me at 503-957-4518 or eschmit2@uoregon.edu, or Dr. Patricia Lambert at 541-346-2050. Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial the following statements to indicate your consent. Because interviewees differ in their wishes for information to be collected during the interview and in reviewing the information before publication, please specify your understandings and preferences in the list below:

_____ I understand that I will be identified as a participant in this research project.

_____ I consent to the use of note taking during my interview.

_____ I consent to the use of audio recording during my interview.

_____ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

_____ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

_____ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study. I understand that the principal investigator will send me by email a copy of all of the quotes and paraphrases that are directly attributable to me, and that I will have the opportunity to approve and/or revise these statements by a clearly defined deadline.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue

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participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Erin Schmith

Graduate Student

Arts Administration, Museum Studies Concentration

University of Oregon

503-957-4519

eschmit2@uoregon.edu